

# **FORT WILLIAM** 1803-1821

It was not founded by the French, although they were first to recognise the strategic nature of the area. Nor was it a rendezvous of the native peoples, although the entire enterprise depended on their knowledge of the wilderness and their skill as hunters and trappers. It can be termed in some measure an English venture, since it was made possible by the triumph of British arms and by British dominance of the sea lanes. But the directing minds were traders and explorers who were nearly all Scots. Remarkably though, as Fort William flourished, it drew together men of many nations.

It was Canadian, then, typically Canadian. It was the inland headquarters of a great Montreal-based commercial enterprise which was served by the daring and skill of French voyageurs; by the technology of the native: by the canny, long range planning of the Scottish merchants.

The men who took part could not know what they were creating. Yet, they were founding Canada geographically. Could people of such different origins, languages, and standards make common cause? The fact is that they did. The men of Fort William and of the North West Company formed themselves into a hard driving team, united in the daring task of opening up a new country. It was a precarious unity which they achieved, troubled by internal discord. Nor did it last for long. But its effect was to establish Canada, at least as a cartographical entity, while it furnished an object lesson of what the whole of our country has been attempting ever since.

Located on the banks of the Kaministiquia River in Thunder Bay, Ontario, 9 miles from its original site, Fort William reconstructed serves to remind us all of the birth of this great nation.



For further information, reservations, etc. write:  
Old Fort William  
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Ministry of Culture and Recreation  
Hon. Robert Welch Minister  
Robert Johnston Deputy Minister

Venture into the Past!

How to Enjoy Your Visit to

Old Fort William



PLEASE TAKE A MOMENT TO READ THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION. IN DOING SO, YOU WILL IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF YOUR VISIT TO OLD FORT WILLIAM.

## **VISITOR SERVICES AREA**

**FACILITIES & SERVICES:** In addition to information on the city; rest and refreshment facilities; gift items; and supplies, you will find courteous personnel ready to help you plan your visit and answer your questions. Ask about our special activities and regular program features.

**ORIENTATION SHOW — "THE GREAT RENDEZVOUS":** Whether this is your first or fifth visit to Old Fort William, you really should begin your tour by viewing our 15 minute film on the history and significance of Fort William.

**ACCESS TO HISTORIC AREA:** After purchasing your ticket, you may choose to take a scenic 5 minute walk along our nature trail or to climb aboard a horse-drawn wagon for a more leisurely approach to the site. Both routes will take you along the wharf and to our main gate (No. 45).

## **HISTORIC AREA**

**GUIDED TOURS:** As noted on your site map, guided tours are offered at regular intervals from the main gate free of charge. The frequency of these tours is geared to the number of visitors, and, consequently, they could be offered as often as every 15 minutes.

Ideally, groups should not exceed 25 persons. If your group is too large and you do not have time to wait for the next one, we suggest that you tour on your own. If you encounter problems, our staff will be happy to direct and advise you.

**CANTINE SALOPE (No. 6):** Our historic restaurant, the "Cantine Salope" is located in the southwest corner of the main square and could be the ideal spot if you are in need of refreshment during your tour. We serve hot and cold beverages and such dishes as stew, soups, and fresh baked bread.

## **REGULATIONS:**

- Because of the extreme fire hazard posed by the many wooden structures on site, please confine your smoking to the "Cantine".
- For safety reasons, no pets are allowed in the historic area.
- Amateur and professional media enthusiasts must obtain permission from a member of our supervisory staff before setting up any equipment which might hamper the enjoyment of our other visitors (lights, tripods, etc.). If you plan to take photographic material or make recordings for commercial use, you must sign a Media Release form. These forms are available in the Visitor Services building and from our supervisory staff.
- No tips, please!

At Old Fort William, Canada's fur trade past is vividly recalled. Fragments of the past are everywhere... in the hectic activity of the Great Rendezvous of the Nor' Westers... the arrival of canoe brigades from Montreal, the Red River, the Saskatchewan, the Rocky Mountains and Lake Athabasca... the exchange of pelts, especially beaver, for manufactured goods from the trading centres of the world... the intermingling of Scottish entrepreneurs, French Canadian engages, and native people upon whom the fur trade depended... the exploration of half a continent to the Arctic and Pacific Oceans... the historic names — Mackenzie, Fraser, Thompson, McGillivray, McTavish, McLoughlin... the rivalry of the North West Company with the Hudson's Bay Company and the American Fur Company... Lord Selkirk's takeover and occupation of Fort William of 1816-17 in retaliation for the Massacre of Seven Oaks... the skills, festivities, and everyday life of ordinary people in fur trade society of one hundred and sixty years ago.

These are some of the themes brought to life at Old Fort William:  
**NATIVE LIFE:** The profound effect of Canada's native people on the fur trade and, thus, on the shaping of a nation is felt throughout the area. Examples of the interaction of European and native cultures can be found in the Native Encampment (No. 52A), where members of the Ojibwa tribe perform ancient Indian crafts; in the Indian Shop (No. 4) where natives trade furs, game, and other items for manufactured goods; and in the role of all women being portrayed.



**THE MAIN SQUARE — CENTRE OF THE RENDEZVOUS:** Facing the Fort's Main Gate are the impressive summer quarters of the Company agents, partners, and clerks (Nos. 16, 17, 18).

To the west are the great warehouses (Nos. 10, 13), where trade goods destined for distant posts and merchandise to be purchased by the Nor'Westers are stored. To the east are the vast pack stores (Nos. 11, 11A, 11B), for furs harvested throughout the Northwest.

In the southern section of the Main Square are storehouses for provisions (No. 9), for corn (Nos. 7, 8), the fuel of the canoe brigades, and for liquors (No. 6), that staple of the fur trade.

Tucked in behind the Main Square are two of the most important buildings at the Fort: the Counting House (No. 12), where clerks keep careful account of profit and loss, and the Council House (No. 24), where agents and partners meet to determine policies for the Company's far-flung empire.

**TRANSPORTATION:** Ideally suited for paddling enormous distances and portaging over arduous trails, the Indian birch bark canoes carried the bulk of the Company's trade goods and furs. In the Canoe Shed (No. 29), you will see 36' Montreal canoes and 24' north canoes being built and repaired.

On the Great Lakes, schooners and bateaux were used to transport the heavy freight. Be sure to visit the Naval Shed (No. 54), where ship's carpenters are constructing a schooner and a bateau, using historic methods.

**VOYAGEUR LIFE:** Every spring from 1803-1821, over a thousand French Canadian and Indian voyageurs would paddle from Montreal and the inland posts to Fort William for the annual Great Rendezvous.

After your visit to Boucher's House (No. 42), the scene of revelry for travel-weary voyageurs, see how they live outdoors at the Winterers' Camp (No. 52C), and how the voyageur élite, the guides, enjoy the relative comforts of the Guides' House (No. 19).

**THE TRADESMEN'S AREA:** Employing period technology, the Fort's carpenter (No. 26); blacksmith and tinsmith (No. 27); armourer and tailor (No. 28); and cooper (No. 30) make and mend items for on-site use and for trade. In the operation of the North West Company, these tradesmen played a vital role.

**THE FARM:** An essential support service for the fur trade, the farm (Nos. 35-39) provided the Fort's summer inhabitants with fresh meat, dairy products, and vegetables, as a supplement to their regular diet of pemmican or corn and grease. In the Ice House and Dairy (No. 41), you may lend a hand in the churning of butter.



**FOOD PREPARATION:** During the Rendezvous, the Kitchen fed the gentlemen, who dined in the Great Hall, (Nos. 20 & 17). Today, it produces the bread which you can enjoy in the Cantine (No. 6).



**MEDICINE, DEFENSE AND JUSTICE:** In the Hospital (No. 21), you may see the practice of early 19th Century medicine; in the Powder Magazine (No. 5), trade guns and cannon. Don't miss the Common Gaol (No. 23) — pronounced "jail" — where rough justice is meted out to recalcitrant voyageurs.



**YEAR-ROUND RESIDENCES:** After the throngs of winterers and Montrealeers departed at the conclusion of the Great Rendezvous, perhaps two dozen or so men remained at Fort William.

The Fort's proprietor and the captain of the schooner lodged in the Wintering House (No. 1), while the superintendent and foreman of labourers, James Taitt, lived year-round in Mr. Taitt's House (No. 33).

Although the Fort's doctor often wintered at nearby posts, he had his permanent domicile and apothecary at the Fort (No. 2).

The tradesmen had their own dwelling (No. 25), while some of the farm labourers lived in the Cottage (No. 40). In these dwellings, you will see how family life "à la façon du nord" varied according to the social status of the inhabitants.





The key numbers are for identification purposes only and do not imply a visit sequence. For reasons of authenticity, buildings and areas (except Cantine) are not signed or numbered.

- 1 Wintering House
- 2 Dr. McLoughlin's House and Apothecary
- 3 Stone Store
- 4 Indian Shop
- 5 Powder Magazine
- 6 "Cantine Salope" —Historic Restaurant
- 7 No. 1 Corn Store
- 8 No. 2 Corn Store
- 9 Provision Stores
- 10 Dry Good Stores—Shops (10A) Toilets and Telephone
- 11, 11A, 11B Pack Stores
- 12 Counting House

- 13 Dry Good Stores—Outfits
- 14 East House
- 15 "Hangard"
- 16 North West House
- 17 Great Hall
- 18 Bell House
- 19 Guides' House
- 20 Kitchen
- 21 Hospital
- 22 Necessary
- 23 The Common Gaol ("Pot-Au-Beurre")
- 24 Council House
- 25 Tradesmen's House
- 26 Carpenter's Shop

- 27 Blacksmith's and Tinsmith's Shop
- 28 Armourer's and Tailor's Shop
- 29 South Canoe Shed
- 30 Cooper's Shop
- 31 Agret Store
- 32 North Canoe Shed
- 33 Mr. Tait's House
- 34 Naval Shed
- 35 Cattle Barn
- 36 Cattle and Sheep House
- 37 Barn
- 38 Toilets and Telephone
- 39 Stable and Cow House

- 39 Barn
- 40 Cottages
- 41 Ice House and Dairy
- 42 Boucher's House
- 43 South West Bastion
- 44 South East Bastion
- 45 Main Gate and Guard House
- 46 Parking and Visitor Services
- 47 Flagpole
- 48 Herb Garden
- 49 Kitchen Garden
- 50 Palisade
- 51 Naval Yard

- 52A Indian Camp
- 52B Montrealers' Camp (to be developed)
- 52C Winterers' Camp
- 53 Wharf
- 54 Observatory
- Indicates Wagon Stops
- Indicates Wagon Route
- Indicates Foot Path
- 👤 Greeting & Guided Tour Area

